Working in partnership to protect Puget Sound

Vol. 19, No. 2

From science to stewardship in San Juan County



Photo courtesy of FRIENDS of the San Juans Becky Hawley from Orcas Island helps survey for forage fish in September 2003.

RIENDS of the San Juans are using science and stewardship to make a difference in northern Puget Sound. In 2000, FRIENDS, a nonprofit group based on San Juan Island, started to survey and map populations of **forage fish** and eelgrass beds in San Juan County. These findings guide the organization's outreach efforts to protect and restore the county's nearshore environment.

Forage fish, such as Pacific herring, surf smelt, and sand lance, are an important food source for salmon, seals, ducks and other wading birds. The small forage or feeder fish are indicators of the health of the Sound. A healthy nearshore habitat is key to their survival. The nearshore environment includes bluffs, beaches, mudflats, salt marshes, gravel spits, estuaries and kelp and eelgrass beds.

Survey helps to protect beaches

More than 300 students and 100 community volunteers participated in a comprehensive, three-year process to collect data and map the region.

"I got involved because this was hands-on, tangible work that I could do to help forage fish, salmon and the Sound," said **Sandy Sanders**, a volunteer from Orcas Island. "I learned a lot, and it was fun. I would recommend that everyone get involved to help our Sound."

The FRIENDS teams visited more than 600 individual beaches on 24 islands. As a result, 72 spawning sites, almost 13 shoreline miles of the San

Juan islands, are now protected by state regulation against development on beaches—such as sea walls, boat ramps and dredging—below the high tide line.

Volunteer efforts didn't stop with collecting data and mapping. Using research as a foundation and with funding from the Puget Sound Action Team's Public Involvement and Education (PIE) fund, FRIENDS staff are educating citizens and land managers in San Juan County how to improve and protect the nearshore environment.

Educating the public

In September 2004, more than 100 shoreline property owners, planners and other interested citizens participated in workshops and field trips to learn about the ecological processes that affect their local beaches. They also learned how to protect their property and maintain habitat for fish and wildlife.

"By engaging citizens in the research and then sharing results with a broad spectrum of the community—such as planners, teachers, realtors and shoreline landowners—we're helping the community better understand how to protect their shorelines," said **Tina Whitman**, environmental programs manager for FRIENDS.

In November 2004, FRIENDS trained teachers with the tools to involve students in studies of forage fish. A valuable learning experience for the students, the educational program will also contribute to the overall understanding of forage fish habitat in the San Juan Islands.

In spring 2005, FRIENDS will sponsor educational workshops for real estate agents, who are in a unique position to offer information to new residents about how to minimize harm to the marine environment. In the past 10 years, the population in San Juan County grew by more than 40 percent—the second fastest-growing county in Washington. FRIENDS will teach realtors about the nearshore environment, low impact development, green construction, managing stormwater and ways to minimize the affects of septic systems that fail, nonpoint source pollution and erosion.

Contacting FRIENDS

For more information about FRIENDS of the San Juans, visit http://www.sanjuans. org/ or call (360) 378-2319.

Task force goal: Improve response to oil spills

hen oil spills happen, minutes count. The longer it takes cleanup efforts to start, the more the oil spreads and coats beaches and boats and causes harm to wildlife. The sooner the responsible party reports a spill, the sooner response teams can be on the scene to contain the spill and avert damage to property and the environment.

In the case of the recent Dalco Passage spill, between Vashon and Maury islands, those responsible for the spill did not report it. The result: an estimated 1,000 gallons of oil spread across an ever-expanding area of Puget Sound.

The slick might have gone unreported until the next day, but at about 1:15 a.m. on Oct. 14, the captain of a passing tugboat discovered the spill and reported it to the U.S. Coast Guard and the Washington Department of Ecology. Darkness and then a thick fog in the early morning hours delayed efforts to assess the location and extent of the spill.

By early afternoon, crews were on the scene, using skimmers and containment booms to recover the oil. During the following two weeks, crews recovered some 6,800 gallons of oily water and 59 tons of oily debris.

At press time, authorities were still looking for the responsible party. As a result, state and federal funds must cover the \$2 million cost to clean up the damage.

In November, Gov. Gary Locke and the U.S. Coast Guard formed an **Oil Spill Early Action Task Force** to evaluate actions to be taken during the early stages of oil spills. The Puget Sound Council is represented on the task force. The final report is due Jan. 5, 2005.

For more information about the task force and other issues related to the Dalco Passage oil spill, visit the Department of Ecology's Web site at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/spills.html.

Sound Waves

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Funding News

Nearly \$800,000 worth of projects selected to help Hood Canal's waters

Fourteen organizations will share in nearly \$800,000 to help reverse the all-time low levels of dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal and help improve the quality of water for rockfish, shrimp and other marine life. Through December 2005, the Puget Sound Action Team will distribute the money for the projects.

The array of projects seek to improve the management of onsite sewage systems, investigate approaches to alternative ways to manage sewage systems, make productive use of previously discarded salmon carcasses and conduct extensive education and outreach with property owners.

Rep. Norm Dicks worked with Congress to appropriate \$500,000 and the Washington State Legislature appropriated \$100,000 for these awards. Other funding came from the Action Team's funds to protect and restore Puget Sound and the Washington Department of Ecology's federal funding to improve the quality of water.

To find out who will share in the \$790,000 award, visit http://www.psat.wa.gov/Programs/hood_canal/hc_funding.htm

Organizations plant SEEDs to help Puget Sound's waters

The Puget Sound Action Team will provide \$46,000 worth of **Small Environmental Education Dividends (SEEDs)** to 11 organizations to help children and adults nurture Puget Sound's marine environment. This is the Action Team's second round of SEED funding this year.

The funding will help the selected environmental and cultural organizations, schools and local governments conduct hands-on activities to help protect and restore the Sound.

Projects must improve the quality of water and marine life in the Sound, through direct actions or changes.

The diverse and exciting projects include educating citizens about their watersheds; training volunteers to monitor habitat; teaching middle school students about spartina, an invasive aquatic plant; helping elementary students release young chum salmon into a stream; educating builders, developers, realtors and others about environmentally friendly building practices; and training teenagers to educate Pierce County's South East Asian community about pollution.

For more information on who will plant SEEDs for Puget Sound, visit http://www.psat.wa.gov/Programs/Education.htm



If you would like this document in an alternate format, call: Olympia area: (360) 725-5444 Toll free: (800) 54-SOUND TDD number: (800) 833-6388



Office of the Governor

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Shared strategy to protect salmon

any populations of salmon and trout in Puget Sound are at risk of extinction for a variety of reasons. Chinook salmon, summer chum salmon from Hood Canal and the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca, and bull trout are all listed as threatened according to the federal Endangered Species Act.

To reduce further risks and harm to these fish, a federally endorsed plan to recover salmon populations is underway that pulls together the work of scientists, citizens and interested organizations. This unique collaborative effort is the **Shared Strategy for Puget Sound**.

Local planning groups have already provided draft chapters for a plan to address recovery of salmon in their watersheds. To complement this work, the Puget Sound Action Team worked with technical advisors and a nearshore policy group composed of diverse interests and authorities to contribute a separate chapter outlining the needs of salmon in the **nearshore and marine environments** of Puget Sound.

Nearshore focus

To prepare the chapter, Action Team staff and the nearshore policy group developed goals with technical advisors. The group also developed hypotheses to describe salmon interactions, habitat features, ecosystem processes and the effects of various stressors on salmon in the nearshore environment (such as development along shorelines, water quality and loss of habitat). The draft regional chapter takes a big picture view, looking at how

nearshore environments support many populations of salmon. The local watershed chapters are mostly focused on their discrete regions.

Strategy for salmon

From this large-scale perspective, Action Team staff and the policy group have formulated strategies and actions to benefit all the populations and lifehistory stages of salmon, which use the nearshore and marine environments.

Recommendations from this work include:

- Protect critical feeder bluffs, which contribute valuable materials such as sand to create and maintain healthy habitat.
- Restore waterways, especially small estuaries, lagoons, and other features that provide refuge and food for juvenile salmon going to the ocean.

Next steps

In September 2004, Action Team staff shared a draft of the nearshore chapter with the policy group, Shared Strategy, and the NOAA Fisheries' technical review team. Shared Strategy expects to complete its work and recommendations in June 2005 and present the Puget Sound salmon recovery plan to NOAA Fisheries.

For more information on the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound visit

http://www.sharedsalmonstrategy.org/ For specific information about the Action Team's nearshore chapter, contact **Dan Averill** at (360) 725-7459 or daverill@psat.wa.gov.



SALMON SUMMIT

People from communities throughout Puget Sound will come together to announce results from their work to increase salmon populations at a summit on Jan. 26 –27, 2005 at the Tacoma Dome.

The summit aims to celebrate successes to date and to develop actions to restore Puget Sound watersheds and salmon runs. For more information about the Shared Strategy Summit: Creating a Future for Both People and Salmon, visit www. sharedsalmonstrategy. org/summit/index.htm.

Above: Sockey salmon Photo by Thomas Quinn, University of Washington

Communities improve growth plans to protect habitat

uring 2004 and 2005, all local governments in Puget Sound cities and counties are updating growth management plans and ordinances to manage growth to meet the demands of continuing growth in the region.

As part of this effort, local governments are updating their **critical areas ordinances**, to protect fragile and important places. Critical areas include fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, geologic hazards and frequently flooded areas. The state Growth Management Act requires that ordinances include the best available science and give special consideration to conserve or protect salmon.

At the same time, groups from 14 watersheds are participating in the **Shared Strategy for Puget Sound**, a regional recovery plan for salmon listed as

threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (see above article). In the recovery plan, critical areas ordinances will play a key role to protect salmon habitat at the local level.

"The ordinances are an essential tool in our efforts to save wild salmon in Washington," said **Bill Ruckelshaus**, chair of Shared Strategy.

"It is up to local governments to adopt these recommendations through critical areas and other ordinances" said **Martha Neuman**, Snohomish County's lead planner for the Snohomish Basin recovery effort. "The people who worked on these recommendations worked hard, and I am happy that some jurisdictions, such as Snohomish County, are already looking at them to determine how best to integrate them into the county's updates to critical areas ordinances and shoreline master program."



PUGET SOUND ACTION TEAM (360) 725-5444 (800) 54-SOUND www.psat.wa.gov

The Puget Sound Action Team is the state's partnership for Puget Sound. The Action Team Partnership defines, coordinates and puts into action the state's environmental and sustainability agenda for the Sound. Representatives from the following groups serve on the Action Team:

Local Government

City of Burien, representing Puget Sound cities

Whatcom County, representing Puget Sound counties

Washington State Government, directors of the following agencies

Operations of the following agencie

Community, Trade and Economic Development

Conservation Commission

Department of Agriculture

Department of Ecology

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Department of Health

Department of Natural Resources

Department of Transportation

Interagency Committee for

Outdoor Recreation

Parks and Recreation Commission

Tribal Government

Tulalip Tribes, representing Puget Sound Tribes

Federal Government (Ex-officio) NOAA Fisheries

U.S. Environmental Protection

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Chair: Director of Puget Sound Action Team

The **Puget Sound Council** includes representatives from business, agriculture, the shellfish industry, environmental organizations, local and tribal governments and the legislature, and it provides advice and guidance to help steer the Action Team.



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2005 PUGET SOUND GEORGIA BASIN

Research Conference: March 29-31, 2005

Science for the Salish Sea: a sense of place, a sense of change

The Puget Sound Action Team, the Georgia Basin Action Plan partners and many generous co-sponsors will host the 7th Puget Sound Georgia Basin Research Conference March 29-31, 2005 at the Washington Trade and Convention Center in downtown Seattle.

The conference is the premier gathering for marine science in the Puget Sound Georgia Basin region, and provides a venue for scientists, tribal governments and First Nations, educators, decision-makers, resource managers and students from both sides of the border to share results from a wide range of disciplines. Visit the conference Web site for more information at http://www.engr.washington.edu/epp/psgb/call.html.

The Puget Sound Action Team is offering scholarships and student discounts for the research conference. Eligibility and application information will be posted on the conference Web site in December.